Meeting you again

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by Pufosenie23

Summary

What if Mischa didn't die that night, all those years ago? What if she escaped? What if she lived on, in a different country, with a different last name and faded memories of her lost family? What if she met Will in college and quickly formed a strong bond with him? What if Hannibal met her again afer so many years, through one Will Graham? This is a exploration of what could have been.

Or
I wanted Will and Mischa friendship and a not-a-serial-killer Hannibal. This is what came out of it. (Seriously though, Will and Mischa's friendship is goals)

Notes

TW: PLEASE GUYS READ THE TAGS. There are some mentions of past child abuse here, although nothing too graphic. If you know that upsets or triggers you, please proceed with caution. Stay safe.

For clarification, I played with the timeline a bit. In this, Will was already working with Jack for some time before being asked to assist on the Minnesota Shrike case. Also the entirety of episode 1 until after Will and Hannibal's first encounter remains the same.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

When Will was just a weird, introverted, little boy he was convinced he was going to end up alone for the rest of his life. A rather dark thought for someone so small, but Will wasn't dumb. The experience he'd gathered during the few years he had been on Earth was quite in favor of Will turning out a loner and a complete outcast. Living with an alcoholic father, motherless and with the violent thoughts that circulated inside his mind, curtesy of his overactive imagination and empathetic inclinations, did not make for a stable, well-adjusted individual. Often times Will found himself picking up mannerisms from the people around him. Sometimes, it was subconsciously, other times, intentionally, but every time was a desperate attempt to fit it, to be accepted. Playing with one's hair when nervous, biting one's nails, speech patterns, cadence, the way someone holds themself, sitting in chairs a certain way, every individualized, personal tick was like an open book to Will, not only to read, but to apply to himself, to make himself the main character. Some past therapists called it an extraordinary gift, a wonder of nature. Will called it a burden. He didn't want to be extraordinary; he didn't want to crawl into other persons' heads, wrap himself in their view of the world and let it slowly rip away his own reality, replace it with their own souls. But that is what he did. That is how he lived.

On his bad days, when Will felt petty and irritated and just about done with the world, he allowed himself the freedom of blaming his darkest impulses on his dad. Sure, looking into all sorts of crazy murderers' minds didn't help his situation, but the seed, the root of the problem, Will liked to think it came from growing up with his father. Will liked to think that he himself wasn't that fucked up and that his most violent inclinations were a result of years of mirroring the abusive, alcoholic asshole that was supposed to raise him. He wondered what a therapist would have to say about this. They would probably have a field day with him.

On his bad days, Will felt like his entire personality was just a stitched-up mess of all the other people he'd encountered in his life.

On his bad days, Mischa would drag him out of the mess of pillows and sheets that he called a bed, plop him down in one of their cheap plastic chairs that sat around the kitchen and proceed to thrust into his hands a plate full of eggs, bacon and boiled potatoes. She then would sit down on the only other chair available at their little wooden table, making sure to scrape its legs hard against the white tiles. A way to annoy Will and properly wake him up. Mischa would stare, Will would avoid eye contact and instead stare at his food like it had been cooked by aliens. Although, going by the taste, it might as well have been. How could someone be a mastermind in all things related to baking, but a total failure at cooking was beyond Will.

Finally, Will would relent and dig into his food, not bothering to hold back his grimaces at the taste. How can someone fuck up cooking eggs? The holes Mischa was burning into his forehead would not ease until the entirety of Will's breakfast was gone, and the empty plate placed on the table.

"That ... was awful." Will would say, finally looking up to glance at the woman that he viewed as his sister. Mischa would only smile innocently, dimples deepening, revealing her pointy incisors, her maroon eyes shining with mirth.

"See, this is what happens when you decide to be a brooding bastard and mope around all day. Watch out, Graham, at this rate I'm going to be cooking lunch *and* dinner."

Will felt a big smile stretch his cheeks at the memories despite the annoyance of the day's occurrences. He let the comforting warmth Will always associated Mischa with wash over him and ground him as he parked his old, beat-up truck in the little garage he and Mischa had built behind their house over the course of one particularly uneventful summer. He could already hear his overeager pack of dogs bark excitedly to announce his arrival and sure enough, as soon as he got out of the car, he was assaulted by seven hairy, panting, adorable beasts that just couldn't wait to get their drool and dirty paws all over him. Physically overwhelmed Will let himself get dragged down, laughing, his heart filled with love and mind peaceful as he received one of his daily doses of canine affection.

After successfully disentangling himself from his dogs and making sure they were all content and well fed, Will finally made his way to the house, nose already twitching in anticipation of the tantalizing aromas that were sure to take over his senses as soon as he opened the front door. If the dogs were out of the house at this hour, it could only mean one thing. Mischa was baking.

The proud owner of her own bakery, recently also functioning as a coffee shop, Mischa could only be described as a Baking Goddess and a Coffee Mistress. Her pastries were to die for, warm and fresh, rich in taste with a heavenly aroma, they just melted on the tongue. Her latest, spontaneous obsession, coffee, had been approached in the same manner Mischa approached everything else: with boundless excitement and unwavering passion, diving headfirst into the unknown and enjoying the ride to the fullest, without much concern for possible failures. Sometimes, Will wished he could be just as impulsive and unconcerned, but, ultimately, he thought they made quite the team. After all, someone had to be there to douse the fire a bit, lest it became dangerous. As expected, Mischa's experiments with

various kinds of beans, brews and recipes were met with very positive feedback, bringing new customers, curious to see and taste the newest hype and securing old ones, truly winning them over.

Sure enough, as soon as Will opened the door he was hit with the, by now familiar, smell of fresh pastries. Something with apples, their sweet, fruity aroma filling the air and coating his tongue, leaving his throat dry with the sort of craving and hunger good food always induced in Will- leftover from his early years, forever stained with entire weeks, sometimes months of starvation. Times Will's father had been too preoccupied with securing his next drink to think about his only child. Will frowned at the way his mind seemed hellbent on reminding him of his past and did his best to focus on the present. He disliked how little control he had over his stream of thoughts, how raw and uncomfortable he felt after the cursed meeting Jack had organized behind his back. He had been like this all day, irritable and jumpy -- and, like Mischa would undoubtedly say, like a girl on her period – the case Jack had almost pressured him into working on sitting at the forefront of his mind and rudely refusing to budge, plaguing him with all sorts of twisted visions of deer, antlers and dead girls mounted on them. But meeting that doctor, the shock of his features so familiar, but so foreign, like looking in a broken mirror, his deep voice and curious accent, his overly-formal way of dressing and speaking and, most importantly, the way he could see right through Will, climb over all barriers (forts) and strike at his very core...Hannibal Lecter was something else, a dangerously intelligent creature, if not dangerous all around (he stirred in Will a curious feeling of unsettlement, a feeling not unlike prey being watched by a ferocious, hungry, *hidden* predator). Everything about him rubbed Will the wrong way and he couldn't help but be intrigued. Despite all efforts of paying Dr. Lecter no mind, it seemed like the peculiar man had simply ignored them, preferring instead to carve out a place of honor in Will Graham's brain.

Will gritted his teeth.

"I can feel you brooding over that carpet from all the way over here, Willie. How long do you intend to be glued to that single spot? Or did you have an epiphany? Should I be worried?"

Will was startled out of his thoughts by the familiar, teasing sound of Mischa's smooth, honey like voice and he looked up, squinting, a bit dazzled at the unexpected interruption. Mischa was standing in the doorway to the kitchen, leaning on the wall with her arms crossed, running her sharp, critical eyes over his form, a thin eyebrow raised in question. Her sandy blonde hair was tied up in a messy bun on top of her head, only a few delicate strands of hair falling almost artfully around her face, caressing her sharp cheekbones. Around her waist she had the pink apron Will had bought her as a joke the year before at Christmas, as he was very well aware of her aversion to the color-- an aversion borne only from the fact that it had the audacity to not look good on her. (She had gifted him a brand new pair of glasses--as

his old ones had been chewed to death by his dogs-- and various expensive dog care products and to this day Will couldn't shake off the guilt) Despite the apron, her clothes were covered in flour as was her face, her right cheek dusted with it. Even her hair carried a few white patches. Behind Mischa he could see their yellow themed kitchen. Mischa insisted that if she was the one spending the majority of time in there, it should at least be painted in her favourite color. Will didn't mind. It made the place feel homey and inviting and all Mischa--which was a comfort all on it's own. The table was filled to the brim with ingredients and various bowls of all sizes and the oven was on, clearly working on baking the pie Mischa had crafted.

"Will?" This time Mischa's worried tone was accompanied by her lovely face only a few inches away from him, features scrunched up in concern. She tried to feel his forehead for a fever, but Will swatted her hand away, moving back so he could shed his jacket. She pursed her lips but moved back a few steps watching him warily for any signs that he might collapse. It wouldn't be the first time.

After putting his jacket away in the hanger and toeing off his shoes, Will glanced back at Mischa sheepishly, feeling guilty for making her worry. He knew Mischa was a tactile person, always prone to spontaneous hugs and casual touches, but Will could never really bring himself to be as enthusiastic about it. More times than not, others' touch felt uncomfortable rather than reassuring, bringing with it various expectations of reciprocation or enjoyment that Will simply couldn't meet, so he ended up avoiding it altogether. He knew Mischa wasn't like that and usually he could tolerate her touch, but in his irritated state he couldn't help but flinch away from it.

" Sorry, yeah, I'm fine don't worry. I'm just tired…and I have a headache." Will finally admitted. Sensing an argument, Will moved towards the kitchen, knowing Mischa would follow and hoping to quell at least some of her upset by bringing her to a safe, familiar space. Sure enough, he could hear the thud of Mischa's footsteps close behind him.

"Again?" the exasperation and concern in her voice was almost palpable and Will would have been moved by the level of care if he hadn't already guessed what her next point was going to be."Dammit, Will, you work too much. And even worse, you've let that bastard, Jack, pressure you into this case. Ever since then, you look like death warmed over! Why don't you just quit?"

Called it.

“You know why!” Mischa might have been able to walk away from it all, but Will knew he wouldn’t be able to fit himself and his guilt in the same room if he quit. He knew himself, he wasn’t dumb, he could feel that there was a darkness inside him that far exceeded the ‘normal’ amount and he was downright terrified of it and what it was capable of. What *he* was capable of. And, frankly, he did not want to find out. At least helping people, saving as many lives as he could, even at the expense of himself, helped him sleep at night at peace with his actions, if not with anything else. A rather selfish reason to have for choosing law enforcement as a career path, but Will didn’t think there was anybody out there that could honestly claim total selflessness. At least his selfishness ended up having positive outcomes. Most of the time.

Mischa watched him from beside the fridge, arms crossed and brows furrowed, biting at her lip. Will could feel the hesitancy and concern rolling off of her in waves, clearly torn between finally giving voice to the elephant in the room that was Will’s guilt and his reasons for it or just glossing over it as they have done countless times before. The profiler tensed, awaiting a verdict and not sure what he would do with himself if Mischa decided enough was enough and threw the damning words out to see the light of day.

Fortunately, his worries turned out to be unfounded.

“At least get a therapist. I mean, look at me. You can’t deny therapy definitely helps.” Exhaustion finally creeping up on him after the long day at work, Will just about collapsed in one of their chairs, rubbing at his temples in an attempt to tame the piercing pain that had taken over his head. The slight scrapping of the other chair’s legs against tiles informed him of Mischa’s decision to follow his example.

“Therapy doesn’t work on me. I know all the tricks. And you know how I feel about therapists. All they want is to drool all over my empathy disorder without helping me out in the least.”

“They’re not all like that, Will. Alana would never do that!” It was endearing hearing Mischa angrily defending her own therapist with such fire in her voice. It only served to remind Will how loyal she was towards those she cared about. He knew Mischa viewed Alana as a friend even though the psychiatrist in question did everything she could to avoid such labeling. It was unethical after all and there was nothing that Alana respected more than rules and ethics. Will knew this, being subjected to it himself.

“Oh yeah? Is that why we’ve never been in a room together without someone there to act as buffer? We never even passed the acquaintances stage and we’ve known each other for years!”

Mischa bit her lip, tugging out her pendant from under her shirt and rubbing it between her thumb and pointer finger. The pendant was actually an old ring, a simple band of gold plated metal, its shine long since faded from constant pestering and the passage of time.

“Maybe she figured out your big, fat crush on her and she doesn’t want to make it awkward.”

Wow. Low blow, Mischa.

“That was before I knew she was married. To a woman.” Meeting Margot had been one hell of a surprise experience, but Will couldn’t really fault Alana’s taste in women. Margot was the definition of drop dead gorgeous. And Will had a feeling the dead part was to be taken literally.

Mischa snorted, gazing at him with her eyes twinkling and lips twitching in badly suppressed amusement.

“I don’t even know why you’re so surprised. You’ve always had the worst of luck in relationships.”

That was an understatement. Whether they were male, female or neither, Will always ended up being too intense or too apathetic or too fucked up for any of them. Not that he could exactly blame them. He just wished these things came with a ‘how to’ manual attached. Maybe that way he would stop embarrassing himself all the time. Will actually believed he’d broken the world record of how many times you can put you foot in your mouth in one conversation. His own personal record was 25. It could have probably been more but his date spared him the trouble by simply getting up and leaving.

It didn’t help that most people thought he and Mischa were a couple. Something that made Will cringe every time he heard it, especially since Mischa was a lesbian *and* had a huge

crush on Will's colleague, Beverly. And even if all that hadn't been true, Will didn't think there could be a world where he saw Mischa in other ways other than as a sibling.

"Yeah, tell me about it…" Will watched as Mischa let the pendant fall from between her fingers back in the crook of her neck and started fiddling with a fork that had remained on the table after Mischa's baking session. Will wasn't surprised. Mischa was not a person that he would describe as stationary. She was a bundle of energy at all times of the day and Will wondered how in the world he, the most antisocial person he knew, had managed to make friends with this ray of sunshine that acted as if she fed on social interaction.

"Alana is not the only psychiatrist out there you know. I mean, sure, you've had a few bad experiences, but they can't *all* be bad."

Will grimaced. He took off his glasses and placed them on the table, careful to not dirty them with flour or apple filling, before pinching the bridge of his nose. An image of Dr. Lecter flashed before his eyes, what Will suspected was his trademark smile-but-not-quite-smile gracing his lips.

"Well I just met one today. Jack asked him to do a profile on me behind my back."

Mischa sucked in a sharp breath, eyes flashing with anger.

"What?! I've let him get away with his pushy demeanour until now, but this time--"

Will gripped her hand in his, giving it a calming squeeze before letting go. Fingers itchy with restlessness, he grabbed his glasses, running his thumb over the smooth material of their frame, its familiar texture helping to calm him down.

"Mischa, it's okay. It's already passed anyway. The guy is, admittedly, incredibly smart. Saw right through me." Mischa's gaze sharpened at this and she leaned back in her chair, understanding downing on her.

“He intrigues you.” Will could feel his hackles raise and words of denial and refutal clattered behind his teeth, eager to get out. He let them.

“He annoys me! Five minutes in the same room as his poshy, fancy self was enough to drain my social tolerance batteries for the day.”

Mischa raised an eyebrow, her lips twitching in amusement.

“Sounds like quite the guy.”

Well, Will couldn’t exactly argue with that.

“Yeah, he’s very…striking I guess is the right word. He’s foreign. Somewhere from the Est of Europe, I think. Dressed up to the nines, spoke like he’s stuck in the nineteenth century. Radiates confidence and self importance….Had a bit of a shock when I saw him the first time. He has a face a bit similar to yours. He’s older though. Maybe 7-8 years older.”

“Hmm, seems like he’s made quuuuuuite the impression.” Mischa’s glee was unmistakable. Will could feel his face heating up. That did not come out the way he’d intended.

“Shut up!”

“You’re the one who said he was striking!” Technically true, but Will couldn’t find another word that would have adequately described the man so, truly, the fault laid with him, not Will.

Unable to contain her excitement anymore, Mischa finally asked:

“What’s his name?”

“Hannibal. Dr. Hannibal Lecter.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> I am so so so sorry for how long this took, but hey it's longer than the previous one so that has to count for something right?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With all her boundless energy and out-going personality, Mischa was not a person to wear her heart on her sleeve. She used her excitement and restlessness as an armor, a pretty glamour masking the feelings she didn't want the world to know. It was a clever tactic. Not that it could fool Will. Even if he couldn't feel the surprise rolling off of her in waves, he knew her way too well to not figure out that when her face went blank like that, it meant she was trying to conceal something.

He also knew Mischa wouldn't share unless he gave her a nudge, a reminder that it was no longer her vs. the rest of the world. A reminder that he was right there with her. That he'd been right there with her ever since college, when Mischa took one look at the lonely, dressed down freak in the back of the class and decided he was going to be her friend.

"Mischa? What is it?"

Behind them, the oven started beeping, breaking Mischa out of her dazed state before she could answer. Will watched as she got up, letting the fork she had been holding clatter on the table and went to check on her pie, back purposely turned to him, shoulders tense. She grabbed a pair of worn out mittens from the counter next to the oven and put them on with practised ease before grabbing the pie and setting it on the stove. Will leaned back in his seat and crossed his arms over his chest, tilting his head to look out the window to his left. It was slowly darkening outside, a few stray rays of sunlight getting past the glass and illuminating the pile of pots and cans assembled there. The trees closer to the house were moving slightly with the wind and Will felt a desperate need to open the window and feel the breeze on him. His skin felt clammy with sweat and his headache had only got worse, even with the two aspirins he'd taken earlier in the day. He'd take another one, but he didn't feel like explaining himself to Mischa.

Mischa, who was currently cutting her pie into even slices and placing them on a plate.

“ I feel like I’ve heard that name before.” she finally relented, putting the knife down and bringing the plate with her back to the table.

Will put his glasses back on, feeling his headache receding a little with the return of clarity. He looked at the slices of apple pie, noting their nice, light brown color. They looked delicious.

“Well, he’s a pretty well known psychiatrist from what I’ve gathered. It’s not that unusual, especially since you love reading the kind of stuff they write.”

Mischa hummed, thoughtful and proceeded to stuff herself with a mouthful of pie. Will decided he should follow suit and picked the largest slice off the plate, mouth flooding in anticipation. As he chewed away at the delicious piece of perfection, he could practically feel his stomach thanking him. He told Mischa as much receiving a delighted laugh in return.

“You’re probably right, you know. In fact, I think I’ve heard Alana mention his name once or twice as well.”

Swallowing the last vestiges of pie, Will stood up, yawning.

“Well now that we’ve cleared that up, I’m going to bed. Early morning tomorrow.” Maybe tonight he’ll be able to sleep without nightmares. And without sweat.

“Yeah, “ Mischa said, still deep in thought. “I’ll clean up here. Goodnight, Will!”

“Goodnight.”

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The next few days, Will's headaches seemed to leave him alone for the most part, although not having Jack breathing down his neck every minute might have contributed to that. The man may have good intentions, but he turned into a bully as soon as something didn't go his way.

Will had tried thinking about the case of the missing girls, sitting in his bed at night looking over the files he'd been given on the subject, or at his desk, while working on his lures. He'd even tried holding a lecture on the subject, see if going over it in front of an entire class, in teacher mode, might reveal to him any details he might have missed, or see if his students may have some new insight, but it had been pointless. Every time he'd tried to empathize, he'd only got so far before the slimy, black tendrils of the killer's madness threatened to catch him in their clutches and never let go. He knew he was missing something, something that should have been obvious, but there was a blockage in his brain somewhere and it kept blinding him. And of course, his students didn't have anything new to add. Go figure.

Mischa was worried, Jack was slowly losing his patience and Will was just exhausted.

That is how, three days later, Will found himself ending his lecture ten minutes earlier, watching as a swarm of grateful students made a beeline for the exit. Will couldn't blame them. He wasn't what people would call an easily approachable person on his good days, but with the increasingly painful pounding in his temples and spontaneous hallucinations of stags and dead girls, Will was more prickly than ever, stress bleeding over into his demeanour.

Sighing, he made his way around the desk to his chair and sat down, his movements sluggish, body heavy with exhaustion. He disconnected his laptop from the projector and turned it off, fighting the urge to rest his head on the cool, dark wood of his desk and sleep for the next million years.

"Good afternoon, Will. Is it a bad time?"

Given how sudden and unexpected the interruption had been, Will thought that immediately jumping to a standing position, jostling his desk in the process was, as far as reactions go, a fairly reasonable one. At least he didn't scream. That would have been truly embarrassing.

He looked up and froze, silently wondering if he was hallucinating again. In front of him, only a few feet away, stood Dr. Lecter, wearing a gray plaid suit paired with a red paisley tie

(and he somehow made it work. Yet another sign that this was all in Will's head) holding a bag that seemed to contain several tupperwares. His hair was elegantly slicked back, leaving only a few strands to fall over his left eye. He was studying Will curiously, a slight furrow of his brows allowing the only hint about his thought process. Will was half convinced it was a deliberate move.

"Dr. Lecter, what are you doing here?" Well that might have sounded a bit harsh, but really, it *was* a valid question. It wasn't like it was an everyday occurrence for Will to be paid a visit by a psychiatrist he'd only met once under less than pleasant circumstances. And anyway, Will couldn't be bothered to care how rude he sounded at the moment. Maybe this way, the doctor will leave him to wallow in pain and misery in peace. (Wow, when had he become so dramatic? Must be Mischa's influence)

Also how the hell did he even enter the Academy? It wasn't the kind of place where you could just waltz in, unannounced and Will very much doubted he was a professor here. He would have known if that was the case.

The doctor merely allowed that pleasant, charming smile of his to grace his features (and it was grace, not stretch, because the man carried himself with such elegance and confidence, Will was convinced he was some kind of royalty. As opposed to Will, who often felt like he stumbled more than walked) before advancing a few steps, holding up his bag.

"I came here in hopes of sharing a delicious lunch with Mrs. Bloom, but it seems she is occupied at the moment. Then I stumbled upon your class and I couldn't help but wonder if you would like to join me instead."

Will stared. It seemed like Alana knew Dr. Lecter quite well if they were sharing lunch together. (But then again, the doctor did just walk into his classroom without any prior notice only to ask Will if he wanted to join him for lunch, so who knows?)

And then Will's stomach decided to let both of them know he hadn't eaten anything all day. Embarrassed, Will threw his hands up and promptly headed towards the exit, gesturing for the doctor to follow him. He left his laptop and files on the desk, knowing he was going to come back for his next few classes anyway.

“Oh, what the hell, come on, we’re eating in my office. We’ll have some privacy there. I have the feeling you’ll want to do more than just share a meal in silence.”

Will heard the soft thud of the doctor’s footsteps on the floor behind him. He couldn’t see Dr. Lecter’s face with his back turned, but he could almost feel the smirk masked by a polite, if a bit condescending smile.

“Is that what you wish for? I have to confess, I am not usually one for silent meals, but I’m willing to make an exception. I wouldn’t want to impose more than I already did, after all.”

Will snorted and threw a glance back at the doctor as they rounded a corner. Their steps bounced loudly off of the thick walls of the empty hallways.

“I wouldn’t call it imposing, you’re the one who’s willing to share his lunch and a perfectly good break with *me* of all people.” Will stopped in front of a wooden door decorated with a simple card that read *Prof. Will Graham* in neat, cursive letters. He took out a small metal key from his back pocket and fitted it into the lock before turning it. “Maybe I should be the one to apologize.” the profiler added jokingly, expecting at least a chuckle, but he received only silence in return.

He entered the office, wincing at he sight of it. It wasn’t big, nor small. Medium sized, if Will had to define it. But it was clear that no one had entered it for more than a few minutes at a time and that was only to leave stacks after stacks of papers on the dusty desk or, when there was no more space there, around it. To top it all, the only source of light and fresh air was a sole, lonely window right above Will’s bureau, that, Will noticed relieved, was opened, letting a slight breeze enter the room.

Flushing slightly, Will began to swiftly remove the papers on the desk, placing them anywhere he could find an empty spot, mumbling apologizes for the mess in Dr. Lecter’s direction, not actually daring to look at him.

The doctor placed his tupperwares filled bag on the now cleared table with great care, before moving towards Will and putting a reassuring hand on his shoulder (the bad one, Will registered somewhere in the back of his mind). His hand was warm, and big, nails meticulously trimmed and surprisingly welcome for an unexpected touch- usually, by now, Will would have already shrugged the offending member off.

The moment Will managed to drag his eyes away from Dr. Lecter's hand a bit higher, up to his lips, Will's brain kicked into gear and he realized the doctor was actually talking, not merely moving his mouth in meaningless, soundless shapes, as if underwater.

"...not have to worry. I imagine that, with all your responsibilities, you are quite a busy man. And I didn't exactly give you any time to prepare now, did I?" He smiled. A small, calming, pleasant stretch of his thin lips and Will wondered if it was genuine.

Curious, Will tilted his head enough to get a glimpse of Dr. Lecter's eyes, their intesity shocking him to the point of physically pulling away from his grasp, completely cutting off contact. Even so, Will couldn't shake off the uncomfortable feeling that, for the first time, someone not only had the capacity to see him, but understand him and everything that made up his person on a level Will didn't think he'd reached himself.

Dr. Lecter didn't seem to mind Will's lack of reaction, content to keep talking while pulling out two tupperwares from his bag and setting them on the desk with a quiet clink.

"As for what you've said earlier, I chose to have lunch with you, Will. Do I strike you as a man that usually extends offers such as this against his will? I assure you, I am not. I happen to find you quite intriguing and I believe a good meal can only be beneficial to furthering our relationship."

Will's lips quirked up in a little smirk that he threw in the doctor's direction as he settled in one of the two plush chairs at the table. They were a dark, rich red, like blood and Will hoped, for his own good, that he won't have an episode right in front of the psychiatrist Jack'd hired for the sole reason of having him draw up a psychological profile on Will.

"Quite presumptuous of you, Dr. Lecter. What makes you think I want to 'further our relationship'?"

" You accepted my invitation, did you not?" Dr. Lecter said as he took the seat opposite Will, eyes glinting with humor. Will decided he quite liked their game.

“Pure curiosity. I don’t find you that interesting.” A total lie. The doctor was probably one of the most intelligent and intriguing persons Will will ever meet, but he didn’t have to know that.

“You will.” And wasn’t that enigmatic? Dr. Lecter really had a flair for the dramatics, didn’t he?

A comfortable silence took over the room as the doctor opened the two almost identical looking tupperwares and pushed one over the table in Will’s direction. The profiler stared wide-eyed at the meal in front of him. He guessed it was some kind of salad. Will could spot shrimp, bacon, boiled eggs, corn kernels and some kind of fancy cheese sprinkled on top all neatly arranged in lines inside the tupperware. This wasn’t lunch, this was art and Dr. Lecter knew it too.

“I’m very careful about what I put into my body, which means I end up preparing most meals myself. Here, I brought some forks. ” Will gratefully accepted the fork being handed to him and raised his head a bit so he could make eye contact for a split second. Will’s own way of showing gratitude.

“I take it you take a lot of pride in your cooking. It looks delicious…and very fancy. What is it?”

“Shrimp cobb salad with fresh lemon-chive dressing, one of Alana’s favorites. I do hope you’re not allergic. I would have to apologize profoundly if you were, although if it were like so, you might let me make it up to you with a meal of your choosing. ” Will could sense a carefully controlled excitement in Dr. Lecter’s voice, a note just subtle enough to be considered a playful way to let the other person know he was interested in getting to know them better and that was if it wasn’t overlooked at all or cast aside as a joke. A note so subtle, Will knew that the doctor had put it there on purpose, knowing Will would pick up on it. He mentally added ‘manipulative’ at the list of characteristics Will had picked up from Dr. Lecter. Professional habit, although one that had come in handy in the past.

The list didn’t contain anything truly alarming, so far, although to be fair it wasn’t that extensive. Only things that Dr. Lecter wanted others to see, like his clothes, his accent, his intelligence and affinity for art (the art of cooking in particular it seemed) and a few that could be spotted only if one knew where to look, such as his manipulative tendencies and God complex.Will had done some research the days following their conversation and Dr.

Lecter's papers were, aside from being intriguing and well-written, a true window into his ideologies and beliefs. He remembered one of his papers in particular, "Evolutionary Origins of Social Exclusion"- a fancy name for what, at core, translated as 'Why am I lonely? A history'. It was clear that the author often felt misunderstood and, although implied so subtly most wouldn't notice, surrounded by idiots. Will could relate.

"Careful, doctor, you almost sound hopeful. Fortunately, I'm not allergic. I would hate to miss the opportunity to taste something that looks this good. " Without further ado, Will stabbed through a piece of shrimp, catching some lettuce and corn kernels on his fork as well. Across from him, Dr. Lecter watched him with interest while he started eating his own lunch. Will took a bite. His eyes widened momentarily, before he closed them in pleasure. He could feel the flavors, fresh and strong, sweet and salty with a sour edge given by the lemon dressing, a perfect combination that ended in bliss for his taste buds.

"Mhm, this is delicious, thank you for sharing!" Dr. Lecter chuckled, clearly pleased.

"I'm always happy to see people enjoy my cooking."

"As you should. I bet it took a lot of effort, it looked so beautiful. I almost feel bad for having to destroy it."

Dr. Lecter leaned in, a few strands of hair falling across his forehead. It should have ruined his carefully put together look, but it only accentuated his beauty and made him look approachable for a change, less like a marble statue and more…human.

"Sometimes, the best way to appreciate beauty can only be found through the destruction of it. In our case, it's not only the best, but also the only way to do it."

Will raised an eyebrow and Hannibal smiled slightly at the sight of it, gentle crows-feet appearing at the corners of his eyes; indicating that this time, the sentiment behind it was genuine.

"I would apologize for my analytical and philosophical tendencies, but I know I will soon be apologizing again and you'll tire of that eventually, so I have to consider using apologies

sparingly."

"You really can't help yourself, can you?" Now Will was truly amused, especially since Dr. Lecter seemed almost offended at the mere suggestion that he did not have control over himself. It was a funny thing to witness; one of his eyebrows twitched.

"I will have to disagree here." Aaaand there you go, the self righteous indignation has arrived. "I *can* restrain myself, I simply do not wish for it. What would it accomplish? I do not relish in shallow conversation, especially when I have the opportunity to converse with a man whose mind is as intriguingly beautiful as your."

Ah, Will *had* wondered when that particular subject would be approached. He knew it had been inevitable, but the disappointment was still there regardless. He should have known.

"Right, my brain. I guess that's what you're here for."

Dr. Lecter frowned at the sudden cold, biting tone Will's voice had took. He took another forkful of his salad and chewed thoughtfully.

"You misunderstand me, Will." He finally said, apparently deciding on a course of action. "While your empathy is something I would love to know more about, I am also interested in getting to know the person behind it. I am certain I'm not mistaken when I say that with or without your condition, it would be a great privilege and a rarity for anyone to call you a friend."

"So you're calling me antisocial now?"

"Now, Will do not put words in my mouth. Although, I do not find it the great fault many deem it to be. There is nothing bad with solidarity, as long as you are content with it."

Was Will actually hearing this right? His meal lay almost forgotten on the table. He had other things to chew on right now.

“Interesting doctor, are you sure you should be saying that as a psychiatrist?” Dr. Lecter took Will’s attempted humor as the good sign that it was and responded in turn.

“Ah but you see, I am not here as a psychiatrist, Will.”

“Right, right, you want to be my friend, is that it?” Will bit his lower lip hard, wishing there were a way you could swallow your words back where they came from. But Dr. Lecter didn’t seem to have taken it badly. On the contrary, a small grin was tugging at his lips.

“It would appear so, yes.”

Will couldn’t help himself. He laughed, immediately realizing it had been the wrong thing to do as Hannibal narrowed his eyes for a fraction of a second before he slipped his blank mask back on.

“Did I say something wrong?”

“No, no, I’m sorry, it’s nothing just… Jack would advice me to keep it professional.”

“Or we could socialize like adults. God forbid we become friendly.”

Will snorted.

“Indeed. I think Jack would have an aneurysm. Can you imagine, he’d have to find another therapist.”

Dr. Lecter leaned back in his seat and studied him carefully for a minute. Will tried not to squirm.

“Do *you* believe you need therapy, Will?”

And wasn’t that the million dollar question?

***

They held movie night once a week. No matter their schedule or circumstances, short of life threatening situations, movie night was a sacred tradition in the Graham household. And also Mischa’s favourite bonding activity. She loved movies, loved to get immersed in the stories told there, important but removed from her entirely in the sense that she could never intervene, only watch. It was comforting to know that if someone in a movie died, it couldn’t have been her fault.

And that was the reason they had first organized these movie nights at all. It had been Alana’s suggestion after Mischa had told her about *the incident*. She could still remember the sound of the man’s panicked screams and Will’s pained grunt as he put himself between Mischa and their suspect and getting a knife in the chest, a little above his heart and right underneath the shoulder, for his troubles. She could still remember the feel of Will’s blood on her hands, under her fingernails, slippery and warm and leaving a metallic smell in the air, making it unavoidable to not inhale it. She had been terrified in that moment that she was going to lose someone again, just like she had lost her biological family and later, her adoptive one as well. She still had nightmares about it.

Baking helped. She could always count on the smell of baked goods and the by now mindless tasks necessary to create them to calm her down and ground her. Movie nights were beneficial to her mental health as well, but Mischa’s true anchor was, of course, Will. She loved him as she would a brother and couldn’t imagine a life without him.

She worried for Will too. Mischa knew the reasons why Will didn’t, couldn’t walk away from it all, like she had, but she could see that without some support, Will would soon crumble. And Mischa trusted Will with a lot, but asking for help for himself wasn’t part of that ‘lot’.

It was all Jack Crawford’s fault, really! Will had been doing just fine solving simple enough cases and catching relatively sane criminals, but this case… And Jack had known! Jack had to had known how much more gruesome this case would be and what kind of effect it would have on Will and still, he’d pushed.

Mischa didn’t consider herself a particularly violent person, but it would have been a true pleasure to punch Jack in the face.

Especially since he was now even ruining movie night!

The night had started great, with Will looking more animated than he’d been in days and talking about his meal with Dr. Lecter as they put on “The Sound of Music” (Mischa loved it. Will pretended to hate it, but Mischa had caught him whispering the lyrics to some of the songs when he thought no one could hear him.) Mischa teased Will about his developing crush on the good doctor and got teased in return for being obviously head over heels for Beverly and being too chicken to do anything about it. They laughed and talked and relaxed for once after days of strained silence on Will’s part and then… Will’s phone rang.

He took one look at the caller ID and his face closed off. He spared Mischa a quick glance before he got up and headed towards the kitchen, obviously looking for some privacy. Her gut churning, Mischa dragged the half-empty popcorn bowl from the coffee table on her lap and started munching nervously as the movie played in the background.

The call didn’t take long and soon enough Will was joining her again on the couch, looking forlorn.

“Will? What happened?”

Will sighed, weary and turned to look at her.

“I’m going back to Minnesota. There’s been another murder.”

Chapter End Notes

This work isn't beta-ed so any mistakes are mine.

Thank you so much for reading!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> this was originally supposed to include more scenes, but it was turning out to be a ridiculously long chapter so i had to cut it in half. Hope u enjoy anyway

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The endless darkness that hid behind his eyelids was as familiar a sight to Will as one's own image in a mirror was to others. It spread and it spread, vast, an enormous black canvas waiting to be painted on with Will's own version of the messy, complicated, *dirty* feelings and memories that rightfully belonged to strangers. Or those who used to be called strangers by Will. The profiler wondered, not for the first time, if he could really call those people--whose minds he invaded, uninvited and unwanted -- strangers after diving head first into the ocean of their deepest, darkest desires, accumulating little pieces of *them* along the way and bringing them back to the surface, forced to articulate his findings into words. Will detested that part, always feeling like his words weren't enough, always inadequate, not eloquent enough to properly express the complexity of the feelings and experiences killers possessed at the time of the crime.

Urged on by Will, the pendulum started to swing, washing away the evidence of the the hideous crime, reconstructing everything from the very beginning.

The heady scent of blood and death filled his nostrils and pained, horrified screams invaded his ears, everything coated with a thick, sickening layer of madness that spread everywhere, threatening to swallow Will whole if he wasn't careful. It was brutal. Too brutal almost and somewhere in the back of his mind, where Will was still just Will, he frowned. This killer treated his victims with far more care and attention than this. This killer was almost gentle in his actions, considerate. He wouldn't waste his victims. Then it would just be murder.

This was wrong.

Wrong, wrong, wrong.

This killer was scared, so scared. Terrified, in fact. The cuts were shaky and Will watched his fingers tremble, covered in red and gripping a hunting knife so hard the knuckles had turned white. The blade was dripping with blood. It gleamed a horrifyingly beautiful shade of black in the moonlight. The victim was squirming underneath him, pushing frantically at her restraints in a desperate attempt to escape her fate. Her black eyes were wide and pleading as s he looked up at him, mouth open in a silent scream. He hesitated. He didn't want to do this, he'd never wanted to do this.

Acrid breath infused with the stench of madness came from behind him, making the hairs on his nape stand up. ***'Finish it. Don't let her death go to waste. Then it's just murder. Finish it.'***

Horror cursing through his veins, Will plunged the knife into the girl's chest one more time.

****

He opened his eyes with a gasp, wavering on unsteady feet, disoriented as he always was after climbing his way out of a killer's mind. His body swayed and his vision blurred with -- what he realized with a worrying sense of detachment were-- tears.

His hands were shaking, Will realized as he wiped at his eyes. Residual fear he supposed. The second his thoughts strayed that way Will physically jerked back, stumbling over his feet.

He was stopped from falling by a gentle, but firm hand gripping his wrist and tugging Will against the person's chest, the stranger's other arm going around his waist. The profiler began to struggle against the hold before his brain registered the vaguely familiar scent of spices and expensive cologne and the comforting tone of a baritone voice calling his name.

Before he could do anything to confirm the person's identity, Will found himself gently pushed into a plush chair and handed a glass of water. He took it gratefully, downing it all in one gulp, relieved and somewhat surprised. He had not realized how thirsty he'd been.

He looked up, squinting at a blurry Dr. Lecter who (or so Will thought, it was kind of hard to figure out without his glasses) was smiling down at him.

“Thank you.” Will managed to get out, his voice smoother than he’d assumed it would be. Must have been the water.

“It was no problem, Will. Welcome back. Is it always such an intense process for you? It was truly fascinating to watch.”

“It’s ah-- um, no, I--” it was too hard to explain and Will really didn’t want to do it in the middle of a crime scene anyway. From the way Dr. Lecter inclined his head in understanding, he agreed with him. The psychiatrist backed away a few steps, letting Will take a breath and acclimatize himself with the world again.

Will slowly became more and more aware of his surroundings, the sounds of the policemen scattered all over the crime scene rushing back in his ears. He noticed with surprise that he was being mostly ignored and wondered if that was Dr. Lecter’s influence. After all, Jack was usually all over him immediately after a reconstruction, overwhelming Will with all kinds of questions, half of which Will couldn’t even understand right away. Now, Jack was a blob of color on the other side of the room, standing near what Will knew to be the bed of the victim while another blob of color- Beverly, if Will was to guess- was bent over the body of the poor Cassie Boyle. Two other blurry persons- Price and Zeller, he was almost sure- stood beside Beverly discussing something in whispered voices, throwing glances in his direction from time to time. So they were talking about him. Will should have figured. Well, at least they had the good sense not to approach him. Or, more likely, Bev had had the good sense to stop them from doing so. Price and Zeller weren’t bad people, Will knew. They had accepted Will’s oddness without comment, taking it in stride and doing their best to integrate him in their little group ever since they’d started working together a few years before. They invited him to their hang outs, included him in some of their private jokes, called to check on him and Mischa from time to time and even dropped by the bakery sometimes. Will would even go as far as calling them his friends on his good days, but they weren’t that good at figuring out when they needed to leave Will alone when he was in one of his moods and when it was okay to approach him. They had Beverly for that.

He looked away from the two, moving his gaze to Dr. Lecter’s expensive blood red suit, which was closer and therefore not so straining to make out from the world of swirling, confusing shapes and nuances.(from what he’d gathered, the color choice had been intentional. The man was overly fond of puns, especially witty, questionably dark ones. Will found it somewhat charming, even if some of the puns the man made-always with a straight face too- stirred in Will an overwhelming urge to both facepalm and giggle uncontrollably). He rubbed at his temples, feeling the start of a monster headache coming and

desperately wishing for his glasses. While they wouldn't stop the headache they would at least help subside it a little.

With a tired sigh, Will started patting his pockets, while muttering to himself. "Where the hell are they?" His glasses seemed to have disappeared, sucked in by a black hole hidden in the depths of his careworn, green tweed jacket.

"Here." Will looked up towards Dr. Lecter's extended hand holding a pair of black framed glasses, lips stretched into a small, almost fond smile. (Will liked that look on Dr. Lecter's face. It made him look younger and more carefree, easing what seemed to be a constant tension in his shoulders. Will liked it even more that he was the one who had put it there) And oh right, he'd given his glasses in Dr. Lecter's keeping before they'd entered the Boyle's family house (Will had been surprised to learn of Dr. Lecter's presence on the scene, but a quick look at Jack told him he'd been hired to assist along with Will. The reason why, however, was still unknown), knowing how often he misplaced them. Will never wore his glasses during a reconstruction. Aside from the physical hazard of unwittingly knocking them over or bumping them into things, Will was under the impression that they blocked him from truly seeing the crime in all its horrifying glory, forcing him to focus too much on the cold facts and not on the emotions. Perhaps it was silly of him, only a psychological obstacle, but one could argue that his empathy was psychological too. Either way, Will liked it better this way.

"Thanks." he said as he put his glasses back on his face, fiddling with them a bit, searching for the most comfortable position. It annoyed Will to no end whenever his glasses stood too close to his eyes or slipped too far down his nose. Somewhere in-between was perfect for him.

The return of the world in sharp and precise shapes always shocked Will a little. The way his entire world cleared in a second and how it breathed life and vividness into previously muddled, dull colors made his head spin a little and relief wash over him. As predicted, he could feel some of the pain pulsing in his temples recede a little and he let his head fall back, letting out a grateful sigh.

Even without looking, Will could practically feel Dr. Lecter's amusement, politely masked by a blank face, not that it fooled him. He had had too much practice with Mischa over the years to be oblivious anymore. Deciding to ignore the doctor for the moment, Will looked around taking in his surroundings with his new found clarity. They were in what had been Cassie's room--typical for a teenager, Will thought. There were Metallica posters on the wall beside her desk--cluttered with still open school books, a laptop with so many stickers on it he could

barely make out the original red color and various drawing pencils (had she been an aspiring artist?). There were a few more posters with some popular TV show or other right next to a small, disorganized bookcase. The walls were painted a sky blue and the floor was covered all over in white fluffy carpets. The butchered body of the teenager sitting in her bed, her eyes closed and a peaceful expression on her damaged face was such a jarring image in contrast with the rest of the room that it almost felt like a dream. A nightmare.

It had been her brother. He was the one who'd found her. Will's empathy didn't make it hard to imagine what the boy was going through and the profiler wanted to find and comfort him as best he could, but he knew he couldn't afford to let himself go down that path. Not with the killer still free to do whatever he wanted. Even though this crime…Will didn't think the original killer was the one who killed this girl, not directly anyway. He had someone else do it for him, the profiler was sure. Someone unwilling. The terror, the silent plea, the struggle, the voice…Will shuddered and let his head fall into his hands. Why? Why would this killer have someone else do the dirty work for him? Why would he risk like that? Was it because he was desperate? Was it because he didn't trust himself anymore? No, surely not. Besides, whoever did this had clearly never killed before. He gritted his teeth in frustration. He was missing something again. But what? What could he possibly be missing?

"Will." Great. Jack Crawford, the last person he wanted to see at the moment. Will was in no mood to be interrogated. Maybe if he just ignored him, he would leave him alone?

"Will. Answer me." Yeah no such luck. Will sighed. He just wanted to get it all over with. He raised his head from his hands and looked Jack straight in the eye. The man was already watching him with his brows furrowed and lips tight, arms crossed and fingers tapping an impatient rhythm. Apparently he'd decided he's given Will more than enough time to collect himself. "Well?" he asked. Well, more like barked. That was Jack for you. There was nothing that could stop this man when he was on a mission, certainly not something as unimportant as Will's moods.

He figured that the faster he told Jack what he wanted to hear the faster he could get the hell out of there.

"*Well,* it's the same killer but you already knew that. This one is different though, more brutal. He's getting desperate. But I can't figure out if he's desperate because we're getting close or…something else. There's something wrong with this girl too. Most probably her lungs, if the cigarettes on her nightstand are anything to go by. The fact that he overlooked something so obvious before he killed her says that he's getting more irrational, more erratic in his behaviour. His madness was overwhelming. I could feel it, Jack. That man isn't sane,

he's nowhere *near* sane." Will didn't know why he wasn't telling Jack about the second person, but he was going to trust his instincts for the time being.

Jack's lips twisted into a grimace and his shoulders pulled back, seemingly trying to do everything in his power to tower over the profiler.

"Yeah, tell me something I don't know, boy. Anything else? There has to be something else you were able to tell from that mess." Jack gestured vaguely in the direction of the body, without turning, his eyes pinning Will in his seat.

'Well there is, not that I'm telling you.' Will thought with an internal smirk. Honestly, he was a little touched by the confidence in him Jack was displaying. Of course, the sentiment was nullified by how forceful Jack was being at the moment.

It was really getting on Will's nerves.

"Believe it or not, Jack, I'm actually only human. I've told you everything I know. If you want more, better start trying to do it yourself."

Jack, of course, didn't like that.

"Agent Graham, you will--"

"He will do nothing, Jack." Dr. Lecter's voice interrupted, abrupt and harsher than Will had ever heard it. Startled, they both turned their gazes on the psychiatrist, who was fixing Jack with a glacial stare, his eyes two rapidly darkening pits. His shoulders were tense beneath his suit and his jaw was clenched so tight Will just knew the doctor was holding back an array of truly impressive, thinly veiled insults.

It was, frankly, terrifying. And equally as exciting. Will was beginning to suspect he and Dr. Lecter weren't that different, deep down.

Obviously, Jack wasn't cowed, as he soon responded with:

"Dr. Lecter, I didn't hire you just so you could order me around--"

"No, you hired me, at first for the psychological profile and now, at my request, for the investigation. You accepted it however, because you wanted me to keep an eye on Will and make sure his mental state doesn't worsen. And so, I stopped you before you could cause further damage. As you can see, I couldn't do that without 'ordering you around' as you'd put it." (and he hadn't even wanted to, Will knew) Dr. Lecter let a glacial smile stretch his lips. He looked like a predator ready to attack at the slightest move. " Do you intend to disagree ?"

People were beginning to stare. Jack shifted nervously on his feet and Will could barely contain his smirk. He would have to thank Dr. Lecter properly later. A short staring contest was held before Jack forfeited, choosing instead to look at a spot somewhere above Dr. Lecter's left shoulder.

"No. Of course not." He turned to Will. "Take some time to gather your thoughts and then return so we can discuss it. You can go now."

As soon as Will nodded, Dr. Lecter exited the room, the profiler hot on his heels.

"Now, Will, what do you say about some coffee? I know a good place in the area."

"That sounds perfect"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long absence guys, life got in the way:((

End Notes

Thank you for reading. Chapter 2 is currently in the making, I'm hoping to get it posted somewhere next week.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!